

MONTANA ON STAGE

“Rubilation”: Celebrating a milestone in Montana dance

Miss Linda’s School of Dance celebrates 40 years with “Rubilation,” a reception, concert and art exhibit, May 18 at the Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts in Great Falls.

Linda Fuller began teaching dance at her home in Cascade in 1973, armed with a degree in secondary education, a background in the arts and a passion for dance.

She taught in Cascade for 11 years, while honing her skills as a dance teacher and businesswomen by attending Montana Dance Arts Association and Dance Educators of America conferences and classes. She eventually moved her studio to the Performing Arts Center in Great Falls, and Miss Linda’s School of Dance landed in its present location at 612 First Ave. S. in 1988. Fuller bought the building in 1996.

Over the past four decades, Fuller has managed to balance her business and her artistry, learning to handle billing, scheduling and advertising, as well as teaching and choreographing performances. Her staff has grown to include seven faculty members, three office personnel and a slew of volunteers.

“It took a while to find a balance between finding the best training and opportunity for students and staying open and making a living,” she told the *Great Falls Tribune*.

And she’s nowhere near the finish line. Although Miss Linda’s School of Dance will remain in its same location, the building was recently christened The Studio Centre, and will become home for all manner of performing arts in downtown Great Falls.

In addition to Miss Linda’s School of Dance, The Studio Centre will house the



Linda Fuller, the owner of Miss Linda’s School of Dance, today ...

newly renamed Young Dancers Company (formerly Performing Troupe), the pre-professional program at Miss Linda’s that’s in its 24th year.

The center will also continue to host the Great Falls Ballet Ensemble, now entering its third year. This ensemble plans to work on some joint performances with the Great Falls Youth Symphony in the coming year. According to Fuller, this collaboration “illustrates the goal of the Centre to bring different

elements of the arts community together.”

The newest ingredient in the Studio Centre’s mix will be Act One Theater Company, a music and theater group designed especially for young people. The company will offer regular classes each week in singing, movement and acting, and will stage a full production each year. Local industry professionals will offer master classes and theater students from the University of Great Falls will share their skills as well.

The Studio Centre “is no longer just a dance studio for children, but a thriving platform for all the arts in Great Falls and a leader in developing collaborative projects and arts-fueled commerce,” says Fuller.



... and Miss Linda in 1982.

“Rubilation”

The celebration the 40th anniversary of Miss Linda’s School of Dance kicks off with a pre-show gala reception and art exhibit, 5:15-6:45 p.m. May 18 in the Mansfield Center’s Gibson Room in Great Falls. Enjoy drinks and hors d’oeuvres and stroll down memory lane with a display of video footage, pictures and memorabilia depicting the 40-year journey of Miss Linda’s from 1973 until today.

A cast of more than 200 local dancers takes the stage at 7 p.m. in the Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts, and showcases the best moves from the past 40 years, from the Hustle and the Electric Slide, to line dancing and break-dancing.

Tickets are \$9-\$25; call 406-455-8514 or order online at ticketing.greatfallsmt.net.

She has a busy year ahead. In addition to “Rubilation” in May, she’ll help produce the Dancing With The Stars competition next fall, the Moscow Ballet’s “Nutcracker” in November, and the Big Band Broadcast Swing into the Season concert in December. Act One will stage a show next February, and then it’s time for Miss Linda’s School of Dance to offer its spring production.

“The Studio Centre is the natural expansion of 40 years in the world of dance,” says Fuller. “It connects all the arts together and creates a home for all Great Falls artists in the heart of downtown.”

Learn more at www.misslindasdance.com.

Stumptown Players: Serendipity births new theatre company

When Tony Hernandez and Jim Mohn met for coffee in Whitefish in the spring of 2010, little did they know that four years later Stumptown Players would be filling theaters in Whitefish and Kalispell. Their conversation serendipitously moved to the fact that the O’Shaughnessy Center in Whitefish was dark for a month in the summer, so they called some theater friends with the plan to fill the void and give themselves another performing opportunity.

About a dozen friends ponied up \$100 each for seed money and Stumptown Players was born. That August, the group hit the theater scene with a crowd-pleasing run of the comedy “Sylvia” by A.R. Gurney. Being new, the group used guerilla advertising to announce their arrival, becoming a presence at farmers’ markets, plastering posters throughout the valley and utilizing social media to inform the community that a new entertainment opportunity had arrived.

Performing for increasing numbers of audiences that first year, Stumptown Players ended the year in the black. They followed the first summer’s success with another comedy, Larry Shue’s “The Nerd” in the summer of 2011. Again, locals and visitors to the Flathead filled the cabaret-style venue.

With another profitable production under their belts, the Players made a leap of faith, expanding their season to offer two plays



The 2012 production of “Looking” featured Alicia Blake, Tony Hernandez, Russ Moes and CrisMarie Campbell.

and adding the KM Theatre in the Historic KM Building in Kalispell as a venue. “Mere Mortals,” a series of one-act plays by David Ives brought theater back to downtown Kalispell after a hiatus of several years.

Audiences clamored for more, so in 2012, the troupe committed to a three-play season. The season kicked off last summer with “Looking” by Norm Foster at the O’Shaughnessy. The Players returned to the KM Theater in the fall with David Lindsey-Abaire’s “Kimberly Akimbo”; and in the cold Montana winter, they lightened things up with “Private Eyes,” a play-within-a-play whodunit, by Steve Dietz.

Having built a faithful following,

Stumptown Players recently announced its fourth season of three shows scheduled for Whitefish and Kalispell. The fun begins at the O’Shaughnessy July 18-21 and 25-28 with Carolyn Smith’s “Kitchen Witches,” described as Martha Stewart meets Jerry Springer.

In November, the riveting drama “Spirit Control,” by Beau Willimon, comes to the KM Theatre. John Kolvenbach’s farce “Fabuloso” offers a perfect antidote to the mid-winter blues in February 2014.

As they continue to expand their seasons and venues, Stumptown Players is always welcoming volunteers in all aspects of production. To learn more about this energetic company, e-mail stumptownplayers@gmail.com, call 406-871-6447 or visit stumptownplayers.org.



Stumptown Players debuted in 2010 with a production of “Sylvia,” featuring Jim Mohn, Michele Keener and Alicia Blake.



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High Plains Book Awards attract 164 nominees

“Women Writing the West” is the theme for the 11th annual High Plains BookFest, Oct. 24-26 in Billings.

In conjunction with the BookFest, the Parnly Billings Library established the High Plains Book Awards in 2006 to recognize regional authors and/or literary works which examine and reflect life on the High Plains.

“For the first time since the library established the High Plains Book Awards, 60 percent of the nominated authors are women,” said Writer’s Voice Director Corby Skinner. “It’s a perfect time to honor women writers with a BookFest theme that reflects their contributions to the western vernacular.”

According to DeeAnn Redman, assistant director of the library, 164 books published in 2012 were nominated for the 2013 competition, and are now being read and evaluated by more than 150 volunteer readers.

The 2013 awards include two new categories, Best Culinary Book and Best Young Adult Book. The other categories are Best Fiction; Best Nonfiction; Best Poetry; Best First Book (fiction, non-fiction or poetry); Best Woman Writer; Best Art and Photography; and Best Short Stories.

For information email corbys@billingsymca.org.